

fidélité comme les cinq doigts de la main . . . Aujourd'hui, nous devenons ennemis . . . Toute notre histoire est une histoire de trahison" [Yesterday we were all brothers . . . We pledged our loyalty to one another like the five fingers of a hand . . . Today we have become enemies. Our entire history is a history of treason].<sup>27</sup> This proclamation speaks to the problem of women's treason and fidelity so fundamental to this book. More than this, An Thu's words represent an ironic and critical reframing of Hồ Chí Minh's own words about the national family. Hồ Chí Minh's famous slogan, akin to Phan Bội Châu's famous saying that serves as the title of *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, refers to the cohesion and unity of the Vietnamese that connects people together like the five fingers that are "unequal in length" but "united [as a] hand." As the women's narratives collectively show in *Vietnam: un peuple, des voix*, their storytelling is not only highlighted by Mai's acts of collation and organization but also underlined by the women's rhetorical power of imagery and figuration. In this is not the production of truth per se but rather the workings of the imagination as a "social practice,"<sup>28</sup> a theme translated in Trinh's re-presentation of women's stories and their storytelling practices in *Surname Viet*.

Nevertheless, in the film's feminist critical discourse, Mai's voice and the voices contained in the collection are referents for a traumatic "real." Despite Mai's self-positioning in her work and sense of discomfort while writing the book ("It is very difficult for a Vietnamese woman to write about Vietnamese women"),<sup>29</sup> one critic has mainly looked at Mai's scholarly work as autobiographical in purpose. Katherine Gracki writes, "[Her] ethnographic project is framed by and seen through the prism of an autobiographical quest for origins and self-knowledge."<sup>30</sup> Gracki goes on to claim, "Like Mai's interviewees, who are asked to take the risk of speaking out against a corrupt regime, Trinh T. Minh-ha wishes to take a risk in revealing the abuses of power and silencing of Vietnamese women in ethnographic representation and documentary practices."<sup>31</sup> While it may be true that the women in *Việt Nam* took a risk in speaking out against the state, Gracki's statement conflates all Vietnamese women, collapsing Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic women as well as the author, Mai Thu Vân, and filmmaker, Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Similarly, Amy Lawrence's essay on women's voices in "third world" cinema underlines a homogenous construction of women. Feminist critics like Lawrence neglect the fact that Trinh's project was a collective effort, not only produced in the global North but also distributed by a major US-based feminist distributor of independent films, Women

Make Movies.<sup>32</sup> Such critical work tends to ignore the relations of power structuring the collaborative efforts in the making of Trinh's film, while also dismissing the web of access that references the ways such texts are circulated. What we must take into account is how Trinh's filmic and critical texts circulate widely within many contexts. Having accrued intellectual capital since her first film and publication, Trinh has access to make and disseminate culture; her long-term relationship with Women Make Movies attests to this. A prominent feminist academic, director, and critic, Trinh's positionality is thus markedly different from that of the women subjects in the film. Any conflation of the women involved in this project homogenizes these key differences of class, capital, and status.

By the same token, however, because Mai's book is bound in a collection and published by a major French publisher, the women's voices contained therein are unquestioned as authentic representations of political and patriarchal repression. In contrast to the Vietnamese women's stories of subordination, which are *recognizable* scripts of "third world" oppression, the oral testimonials of the Vietnamese American women are little studied, since their narratives are cast in more conventional settings. Consequently, viewers see the immigrant women as living subjects in the film whose biographies are recounted through their stories and photographs. Hewing to naturalized filmic techniques and the tenets of US immigrant narratives, the women's stories in the second half of *Surname Viet* are understood as being less forceful in terms of their rhetorical power. Linda Peckham notes that such techniques allow us to see the actresses in more "natural" settings: in their homes, with children, and at work. But while Peckham recognizes the inherent differences between these two communities of women found in the film, she also delineates how the halves of the film ultimately serve a methodological purpose. In effect, the immigrant women's bodies and speech are reflexive elements in Trinh's assault on epistemology. On the reenactments, Peckham observes, "the speaker is an actress, a substitute, a 'fake,' [so] that the interview style becomes subversive . . . the artificial subject points to the absence of a 'real' speaker, an absence that suggests internment, kinship, and death, as well as the survival of a witness, a record—a history."<sup>33</sup>

Without anchoring a "totalizing quest for meaning" to the women's words and their bodies, I flesh out what Peckham calls "a record—a history" and examine the actresses' narratives as part of a meaningful history.<sup>34</sup> I propose that we recenter rather than decenter these women's stories as performative acts in the reenactment of the history of southern